

# U.S. Army Military District of Washington

## Implementation of a Historic Preservation Plan

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**T**he U.S. Army Military District of Washington (MDW) is comprised of six installations with approximately 5,500 units of family housing. Although this represents only about 5% of the Army total (120,000 units within the United States), MDW has 77 General/Flag Officer's quarters, nearly 25% of the Army total of 324 units. All of these quarters are historic. In all, more than 400 housing units within MDW are listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The average age of these quarters is 71 years.

The installations of the MDW have always maintained stewardship of these quarters, but the active preservation of individual and neighborhood groups of quarters began in 1984 when the MDW initiated the process to comply with Army Regulation 420-40, the Army's implementation of the Section 106 review process. Through this process, historic districts were identified at Forts Lesley J. McNair, Myer, and Belvoir.

### *Installation Historical Context*

Forts McNair, Myer, and Belvoir, like all Army installations, have long histories that make them unique. Fort McNair is one of the nation's oldest continually occupied Army bases, established in 1791. The War College campus was built here in 1905, designed by McKim Mead and White. Stanford White had designed long, symmetrical barracks across the street from each other facing the parade grounds. The barracks to the west impinged on the hospital where Major Walter Reed did his original work to cure yellow fever and later died of complications due to surgery in 1902. White fully expected to build on the site, but resistance to the demolition of the hospital prevailed. As a result, six bays are missing from the west barracks. White reveals himself as an optimist for this project, however; the face brick on the facade was left toothed to eventually complete the rest of the building.

Fort Myer was constructed on land originally belonging to Robert E. Lee, but which was confiscated during the Civil War by the federal government when the Lees were unable to pay their property taxes in person, as a provision in the tax law required. The fortification created there was named Fort Whipple and became home to the

Signal Corps because of its prominent location on top of a hill. It was renamed Fort Myer in honor of Brig. Gen. Albert J. Myer, the Army's first chief signal officer. The Signal Corps left in 1887 when General Sheridan changed Fort Myer's mission to become the nation's calvary showplace. The stables originally built for the calvary are still home to the Army's last official horses. Fort Myer is now the home of the Old Guard, which performs military ceremonies, including burials at Arlington Cemetery. It is also famous as the site where in 1907 Orville Wright demonstrated the first powered airplane flight to last longer than one minute.

Fort Belvoir has been an Army post since 1917, originally named Fort Humphreys. It was part of the colonial estate of Lord Fairfax, which he named "Belvoir," for "beautiful to see." It is the largest of MDW's installations, covering 8,656 acres. Fort Belvoir is surrounded by significant historic sites including Gunston Hall, Mount Vernon, and Woodlawn Plantation. The relocated Pope-Leighey House, a Usonian house designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, is presently located at Woodlawn.

### *The Cultural Resource Survey Process*

In 1984, the House Appropriations Committee's Subcommittee on Military Appropriations requested the Army to develop a long-range plan for the care of its historic housing due to the high costs of operating, maintaining, and upgrading these units. This request prompted two Army studies, both of which evaluated the historic and architectural significance of historic units, listed prioritized maintenance and repair requirements, and estimated costs for a 25-year program. The first was *Historic Family Housing Management Plan Study* by Geier Brown Renfrow Architects/MMM Design Group (1985). This study surveyed 100 quarters at Forts Myer and McNair. The second was *Study/Survey of Historically Significant Army Family Housing Quarters* by Mariani & Associates (1986-89). This study surveyed 2,000 historic quarters countrywide. This action by the Army acknowledged the role historic preservation played in efficient management of family housing, and formed the basis for the current prototype design projects at MDW.

MDW and the Army have participated in the process of researching their historic assets as pre-

scribed in Army Regulation 420-40, *Historic Preservation*. Once cultural resources on the installation have been evaluated, a Historic Preservation Plan detailing the conservation and stewardship of the cultural resources is developed. Through this process, historic districts were identified at Forts McNair, Myer, and Belvoir.

This process at MDW grew out of the mutual interest of the Commanding General and a council composed of civilian employees and residents. The Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Engineering and Housing and the MDW Housing Officer took the initiative to assemble a task force which brought together Army housing and engineering personnel, representatives of public preservation agencies, and the Norfolk Architectural/Engineering firm of Hanbury Evans Newill Vlattas & Company. The task force defined three goals: to protect and preserve MDW's historic architectural resources, to provide a standard of excellence in family housing, and to prevent unnecessary expenditures of financial and human resources.

The task force developed a set of Stewardship Standards, or principles applied to work to be performed on MDW's historic quarters. The Stewardship Standards specify treatment of interior and exterior elements of the quarters and are meant to be referenced in conjunction with prevailing Installation Design Guides and the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*. The Stewardship Standards were formally adopted by the MDW in December of 1992. In January of 1993, the Army historic family quarters preservation program was introduced in a

Quarters 20A at Fort Myer, Virginia. Repair of deteriorated wood at the front entrance, and complete paint removal and repainting. Photo by the author.



promotional brochure, *Historic Preservation Plan, Military Family Quarters*.

One objective of the program was to address the need for guidance on the everyday maintenance and repair requirements of the historic quarters. Toward that end, three-ring binders were compiled containing descriptions of all elements from each type of historic quarters found on the three installations. These were distributed to each installation. The *Historic*

*Quarters Component Guidebook* analyzes each quarters, or group of similar quarters, and provides direction on the repair or replacement of specific components. Where historic components are either missing or in need of replacement, the guidebooks specify new ones, chosen with respect to both historic character and modern needs. Modern amenities are recognized as requirements for the comfort of current occupants, and their integration is designed to be as sympathetic as possible to the character of the building.

Another aspect of the *Guidebook* is to represent logical management practices. All components and designs are standardized, which saves time on individual design and contracting efforts and results in cohesive units with equitable components. The production of the guidebooks involved the input of residents and installation personnel. Upon completion in December 1993, the guidebooks were officially sanctioned by the Commanding General and adopted as Installation policy.

#### *Implementation*

The main objective of the Historic Preservation Plan at MDW was the selection of a number of prototype whole-house revitalizations to serve as models for subsequent work. In the fall of 1993, 12 quarters in 8 buildings at Forts Belvoir, Myer, and McNair were chosen as prototypes, based on the recommendations of the A/E and the installations, taking into account scheduled vacancies and a range of occupant ranks and types of quarters. Currently, construction documents have been completed for all 12 quarters, ready for execution upon funding authorization. Two prototypical quarters at Fort Belvoir have already received funding and are being scheduled for rehabilitation in fall 1997. The National Park Service Historic Preservation Training Center is acting as the contracting agency. The construction phase will be used to document the renovation in progress to further the practice of cultural resource preservation at MDW and elsewhere in the Army. Following the completion of these prototype revitalizations, the results will be evaluated and the next phase of the program can be modified if needed before further implementation.

Integral to the whole house revitalization of historic quarters is the opportunity to anticipate future needs that may potentially disrupt the historic fabric of the building and design the solution into the house. A good example of this would be the mechanical and electrical systems of these homes. In all of these elements can be found wrapped and stapled tightly to the baseboards, running in busses next to ceilings forming unlit coves, and plunging through door and window jambs at every floor to reach the exterior, where



Quarters 7 at Fort McNair in Washington DC. This quarters, designed by McKim, Meade and White, is representative of 15 similar General's Quarters in a row. Photo by Nat McCormick.

they snake along walls like vines. The prototype design anticipates the need for growing capability and integration of future new technology by designing a cable space inside the existing baseboard. All electrical lines, telephone wiring, and TV cable to every room in the house run in this space, eliminating the need to extend these services later. If more cable is added, the baseboard is removed and the cable installed. In this way several maintenance headaches are avoided by eliminating the need to drill and anchor into the historic fabric of the building. This reduces water penetration problems and the disruption of the quarters' period appearance.

#### Conclusion

Most of the historic housing at MDW is assigned to higher ranking officers, primarily colonels and generals. Many of these quarters need consolidated and/or updated utilities, and repairs to many building elements suffer because Congress is reluctant to renovate housing which does not directly impact enlisted personnel. Work on these quarters is progressing piecemeal within the limits predefined by Army regulations until Congressional authority can be granted to begin renovation. The present installations at the Military District of Washington must continue to craft compelling professional and economic presentations to Congress so that funding will continue to be available for the appropriate revitalization of Historic Army Family Housing. In this way we can continue to serve our goals of providing a standard of excellence in family housing, preventing unnecessary expenditures of financial and human resources, and protecting and preserving our historic architectural resources for future generations.

#### References

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- 1984
- 1) *Historic Family Housing Management Plan Study* by Geier Brown Renfrow Architects/MMM Design Group (1985) surveyed 100 units at Forts Myer and McNair.
  - 2) *Study/Survey of Historically Significant Army Family Housing Quarters* by Mariani & Associates (1986-89) surveyed 2000 historic units country-wide.
- 1992-present Hanbury Evans Newill Vlattas & Company developed MDW's Historic Family Quarters Preservation Program.

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